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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000387

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TAGS: PGOV PINR KDEM I2

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN POST-ELECTION ALLIANCES

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 306
 IB. B) BAGHDAD 251

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

I1. (C) Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa-led State of Law coalition list, which won a plurality of votes in nine of ten Shi'a-majority provinces, holds a commanding position as it negotiates with rival parties to develop coalitions and assign top provincial government positions. Da'wa and the Sadrists Tayar al-Ahrar slate appears to be the strongest local alliance; Da'wa's relationships with the slates of ex-Prime Ministers Ibrahim Jaafari and Ayad Allawi are more ambiguous and subject to local variation. Initial readouts indicate Maliki's slate will not partner with ISCI/Badr on any provincial council, but may support moderate ISCI officials for secondary leadership positions in some provinces. Da'wa may concede key positions, including governorships, in a few provinces where it ran strongly. With varied levels of support by province, and with its eyes on leading a broader Shi'a/nationalist coalition for upcoming parliamentary elections, Da'wa appears to be showing flexibility in the early stages of post-elections negotiations. End summary.

Results

I2. (C) While Da'wa/State of Law won a plurality in every Shi'a-majority province except Karbala (the only one in which it held the governor's position), its winning vote-count varies from nearly 40 percent in Baghdad and Basra to barely over ten percent in Babil and Muthanna (ref A). The mathematical idiosyncracies of provincial seat allocation will tend to inflate the advantages of the winners, since many votes -- in provinces such as Maysan and Babil, over 40 percent of the total -- were spread among parties that did not win enough votes to gain representation. Final vote counts and seat allocations will not be decided until late February, but it appears, based on the initial results on February 5, that State of Law has won an outright majority on the Basra Provincial Council (PC) and roughly half the seats in Baghdad, Diwaniyah, Dhi Qar, and Wasit. Seat allocation will be much more dispersed in Maysan, Muthanna, Najaf, Karbala, and Babil -- though Da'wa still holds a clear advantage in the last.

I3. (C) ISCI, formerly the dominant party in the south, finished second in six provinces through its Shahid al-Mihrab list, but will only be on a near-equal footing with Da'wa in Najaf, Muthanna, and Maysan. The Sadrists Tayar al-Ahrar finished second in three provinces (Baghdad, Maysan, Dhi Qar) and won at least two seats in each of the Shi'a-majority provinces. Jaafari's Islah party appears to have won representation -- two to four seats -- in seven provinces.

Allawi's list, which performed well in the Sunni-majority provinces, only won representation in five Shi'a-majority provinces (Baghdad, Basra, Babil, Diwaniyah, Wasit) and never placed in the top three in any province. Fadhilah will be barely represented at the provincial level, having eked out just two seats in each of Basra, Dhi Qar and Diwaniyah. Independent coalition lists will play a strong role, especially in Karbala, where one-man list Yusef al-Haboubi defeated a province-specific list spearheaded by ex-Da'wa dissidents. Independent lists in Najaf, Babil, Basra, and Muthanna also figure to play strong roles in the next government.

Alliances: The Da'wa-Sadrists relationship

¶4. (C) Post-election coalitions have not been announced, and future alliances will likely be developed. Future alliances will likely be developed province-by-province. Consensus among contacts holds, however, that a Da'wa-Sadrists alliance across the provinces is likely given the lengthy discussions between the two sides, which have included talks of amnesty for Sadrists detainees (ref B). Da'wa's clear but not always overwhelming victory, combined with the Sadrists' respectable and consistent performance, increases the incentive for the two sides to work together. Ministry of Interior official Adnan al-Zurfi, leader of the Loyalty to Najaf slate and a close confidante of the Prime Minister, told Senior Advisor Gordon Gray on February 10 that he expected a three-way Najaf alliance of State of Law, the Sadrists and his party, which would account for about 17 of the 28 PC seats in that

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province. While Adnan is uneasy about working with the Sadrists given his past conflicts with Jaysh al-Mahdi, he stated, "We are under pressure from the Prime Minister to forget the past and move on." Da'wa CoR member Sami al-Askari told poloff on February 7 that his party would seek alliance with the Sadrists in "every province where it makes sense." Da'wa provincial representatives in Basra and Babil recently told the PRTs that they expect to work with the Sadrists on the new PC.

¶5. (C) The Sadrists, for their part, are happy with the surprisingly strong performance by their Tayar al-Ahrar list, and ready to align with the Prime Minister. In a February 4 meeting with poloff, Sadrist CoR member Baha al-Araji emphasized that 'Ahrar' had no money, made no organized effort to campaign, and did not seriously use the image of Muqtada al-Sadr -- yet still finished about even with ISCI. He said that a "judicial committee" comprised of Sadrists and the PM's representatives has been reviewing provincial detentions and arrest warrants, and will dismiss warrants no longer valid or based on unsubstantiated information. Araji stated that he had met with the PM three times in the previous two days, and that PM Maliki had spoken with Muqtada about Da'wa-Sadrist reconciliation. Araji saw cooperation with Da'wa as a first step in forming a reconstituted Shi'a alliance in advance of the CoR elections later this year.

Allawi, Jaafari, Fadhilah

¶6. (C) PRT contacts and media reports from Basra, Najaf and Dhi Qar indicate that Fadhilah and the lists headed by Ayad Allawi and Ibrahim Jaafari have formed their own local alliance. While members of this bloc (a variation of the July 22 bloc) have been mentioned as possible provincial partners for the PM's list (septel), personal relationships with Maliki, combined with the weak and inconsistent performance of these parties across the south, will make alliance-forming problematic. Allawi has been especially critical of Maliki since the elections and has made overtures

to ISCI, even though an ISCI-Allawi alliance would be powerless everywhere without additional partners. Askari told poloff that Jaafari will be approached for an alliance in provinces where it will make a difference -- presumably including Maysan, Muthanna, and Najaf -- but that it is difficult to predict what Jaafari will do.

¶ 17. (C) Fadhlilah would be more amenable to an alliance, though it has little to offer at this point. Fadhlilah CoR Bloc Leader Hassan al-Shamari told poloff on February 11 that the party was in discussion with Sadrists aimed at creating a 45-seat bloc (30 Sadrists, 15 Fadhlilah) in parliament, while conducting separate discussions with the PM toward rejoining the UIA. PM advisor Askari predicted to poloff in a separate conversation that Fadhlilah would rejoin the UIA in advance of the next round of parliamentary elections. Fadhlilah support for rejoining the UIA also appears at the local level. Fadhlilah members, including Basra Governor Wa'eli, two Sadr City district council members, and PC members in Dhi Qar all told us shortly before the election that they strongly support Maliki. Perhaps not coincidentally, all of them are now looking for jobs in Baghdad.

ISCI-Da'wa

¶ 18. (C) Many Da'wa and Da'wa-leaning contacts have told us that their lists will not align with ISCI in any province. The electoral math helps in this cause; in provinces where ISCI came close to Da'wa, such as Najaf and Maysan, the Sadrists also fared well, limiting ISCI's coalition-making possibilities. In Zurfi's perhaps overstated words, "ISCI has no chance to make a coalition with anyone." In a February 9 meeting with poloff, Babil-based CoR member Haider al-Suweidi, who backed an independent slate in the elections but considers himself a Maliki supporter, said that Da'wa will block ISCI from gaining any governorships and will act quickly to remove ISCI/Badr-affiliated officials from the Iraqi and local police. He surmised that ISCI members without strong Badr ties would be accepted by Da'wa as PC Chairman or Deputy PC Chairman in many provinces, with the Sadrists gaining a few PC Chairman slots from their deals with Da'wa. Askari also emphasized that the Prime Minister would target police reform in ISCI-run provinces, mentioning Diwaniyah specifically. All these contacts (and many others) emphasize, however, that Maliki will likely bring ISCI back into a reformulated Shi'a alliance before the CoR elections -- in part because of the security ramifications of not reining in the Badr Organization.

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Negotiations

¶ 19. (C) Limited information is available about what various parties want from Maliki in return for their support. In Dhi Qar, a Sadr candidate told the PRT shortly after the elections that his party is angling for the PC Chairmanship and that it wants to control the portfolios of municipalities and health. They would like to hold these positions to demonstrate that Sadrists can effectively deliver services to the people. The candidate believed that they should not have difficulty striking a deal, since his party finished second to Da'wa, which wants the governor's seat. Sheikh Amir al-Fayez, leader of the Justice and Unity party, which finished third in Basra, told Senior Advisor Gray on February 10 that his recent discussions with the Prime Minister's representatives and other parties have focused on the governorship and general principles. Discussions about specific ministerial and security force positions would come later.

Letting Go Governorships?

¶10. (C) While State of Law won a plurality in nine provinces, the Prime Minister may not emphasize putting a Da'wa candidate in the governor's seat in every province. As Suweidi put it, "independents with compatible philosophies" will be supported in some cases. In Basra, Sheikh al-Fayez said that he had been in negotiations with the Prime Minister's representatives earlier in the day about being appointed Governor. Zurfi also said that Maliki was pushing him to return as Governor in Najaf, given the coalition dynamics there. (Note: current Najaf Governor Abu Gelal, a nominal ISCI member but also a strong rival of ISCI Deputy Governor and party leader Abtan, also stated recently that Da'wa had approached him about staying in office. End note.)

In Wasit, current independent Governor Latif al-Turfa, a Maliki supporter, hopes to keep his position. Many of these dreams of governorships are surely overstated. Yet Da'wa recognizes that it may need additional support, since Maliki was the face of State of Law and few of the slate's winning candidates are well known in the provinces. In February 3 meetings with Senior Advisor, Basrawi Da'wa representatives, including leading candidate Dr. Chaltag Abud, gave little indication that they were interested in the governorship even though they were ecstatic to win over half the seats on the Basra PC (septel).

Comment: The Big Picture

¶11. (C) Looking toward the national CoR elections, Prime Minister Maliki can seek to lead either a primarily Shi'a but cross-sectarian coalition, or a reconstituted Shi'a alliance along the lines of the UIA, but with a more nationalist identity. Contacts such as Zurfi and Askari suggest that he is angling toward the latter option, and suggested that the Prime Minister's February 4 visit to Grand Ayatollah Sistani gave him additional impetus down that path.

Reconstituting a broad Shi'a alliance while trying to maintain nationalist, non-sectarian credentials will be tricky. These competing interests will probably preclude any exclusive multi-party coalition from being formed across the provincial councils, since the PM will want to keep lines of communication open to all potential partners. In any case, the close relationship between Da'wa and the Sadrists will place increased pressure on ISCI to accept a reduced role in both the Iraqi Security Forces and in any new Shi'a coalition to come. End comment.

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